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United for Quality Care

February 23, 2022

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SEIU 1199 NE

Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Kara O'Dwyer and I am a Personal Care Attendant (PCA) living in West Haven. I'm here today to ask that you invest in home care services so PCAs like me can make a living wage and receive the benefits we deserve.

I have been a PCA for six years under various Direct Care waiver programs administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Developmental Services. I have cared for five different consumers, people of various ages and disabilities. While I've loved caring for these individuals I have struggled with the poverty wages I make. I am a single mother, working 4 jobs and living with my own mother, who also works 2 jobs (including as a PCA). Even with half a dozen jobs between us, we still struggle to make ends meet.

Despite my dedication, I am still drowning in student loan debt, and I go without health insurance or paid time off. One of my consumers got COVID around Christmas, and I couldn't go to my higher paying job because I was quarantined. I lost over \$600 in wages, and I had to use my credit card to catch up and couldn't make high enough payments to avoid my credit score dropping - again.

I get by on the Grace of God and caffeine, but it shouldn't be this way. What we actually need to avoid living in poverty is \$20/hour, health insurance, paid time off, and retirement. These are the basics to our ability to care for ourselves, our consumers, and our families with dignity.

Thank you for your time.